

THE  
CANTERBURY TALES  
OF  
CHAUCER;

WITH AN ESSAY UPON HIS LANGUAGE AND VERSIFICATION,  
AN INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE, NOTES,  
AND A GLOSSARY,

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 THE PRIORESSES TALE.

O LORD our lord, thy name how merveillous 13383  
 Is in this large world ysprad ! (quod she)  
 For not al only thy laude precious  
 Parfourmed is by men of dignitee,  
 But by the mouth of children thy bountee  
 Parfourmed is, for on the brest souking 13388  
 Somtime shewen they thin herying.

Wherefore in laude, as I can best and may,  
 Of thee and of the white lily flour,  
 Which that thee bare, and is a maide alway,  
 To tell a storie I wol do my labour ;  
 Not that I may encreasen hire honour,  
 For she hireselven is honour and rote 13395  
 Of bountee, next hire sone, and soules bote .

O mother maide, o maide and mother fre,  
 O bushe unbrent, brenning in Moyses sight,  
 That ravishedest doun fro the deitee,  
 Thurgh thin humblesse, the gost that in thee alight :  
 Of whos vertue, whan he thin herte light,  
 Conceived was the fathers sapience :  
 Helpe me to tell it in thy reverence. 13403

Lady, thy bountee, thy magnificence, 13404  
Thy vertue and thy gret humilitee,  
Ther may no tonge expresse in no science :  
For somtime, lady, or men pray to thee,  
Thou gost befor of thy benignitee,  
And getest us the light of thy prayere,  
To giden us unto thy sone so dere.

My conning is so weke, o blisful quene, 13411  
For to declare thy grete worthinesse,  
That I ne may the weighte not sustene ;  
But as a child of twelf moneth old or lesse,  
That can unnethes any word expresse,  
Right so fare I, and therefore I you pray,  
Gideth my song, that I shal of you say.

Ther was in Asie, in a gret citee, 13418  
Amonges Cristen folk a Jewerie,  
Sustened by a lord of that contree,  
For foule usure, and lucre of vilanie,  
Hateful to Crist, and to his compaignie :  
And thurgh the strete men mighten ride and wende,  
For it was free, and open at eyther ende.

A litel scole of Cristen folk ther stood  
Doun at the ferther ende, in which ther were 13426

Children an hepe comen of Cristen blood, 13427  
 That lerned in that scole yere by yere,  
 Swiche manere doctrine as men used there :  
 This is to say, to singen and to rede,  
 As smale children dou in hir childhede.

Among these children was a widewes sone,  
 A litel clergion, sevene yere of age,  
 That day by day to scole was his wone, 13434  
 And eke also, wheras he sey the image  
 Of Cristes moder, had he in usage,  
 As him was taught, to knele adoun, and say  
*Ave Marie*, as he goth by the way.

Thus hath this widewe hire litel sone ytaught  
 Our blisful Lady, Cristes moder dere,  
 To worship ay, and he forgate it naught : 13441  
 For sely childe wol alway sone lere.  
 But ay, whan I remembre on this matere,  
 Seint Nicholas stant ever in my presence,  
 For he so yong to Crist did reverence.

This litel childe his litel book lerning,  
 As he sate in the scole at his primere,  
 He *Alma redemptoris* herde sing,  
 As children lered hir antiphonere : 13449

And as he dorst, he drow him nere and nere, 13450  
 And herkened ay the wordes and the note,  
 Til he the firste vers coude al by rote.

Nought wist he what this Latin was to say,  
 For he so yonge and tendre was of age ;  
 But on day his felaw gan he pray  
 To expounden him this song in his langage,  
 Or telle him why this song was in usage : 13457  
 This prayde he him to construe and declare,  
 Ful often time upon his knees bare.

His felaw, which that elder was than he,  
 Answerd him thus : This song, I have herd say,  
 Was maked of our blisful Lady fre,  
 Hire to salue, and eke hire for to prey  
 To ben our help and socour whan we dey. 13464  
 I can no more expound in this matere :  
 I lerne song, I can but smal grammere,

And is this song maked in reverence  
 Of Cristes moder? said this innocent ;  
 Now certes I wol don my diligence  
 To conne it all, or Cristemasse be went,  
 Though that I for my primer shal be shent,  
 And shal be beten thries in an houre,  
 I wol it conne, our Ladie for to honoure. 13478

His felaw taught him homeward prively 13474  
 Fro day to day, til he coude it by rote,  
 And than he song it wel and boldely  
 Fro word to word according with the note :  
 Twies a day it passed thurgh his throte,  
 To scoleward and homeward whan he wente :  
 On Cristes moder set was his entente.

As I have said, thurgout the Jewerie 13481  
 This litel child as he came to and fro,  
 Ful merily than wold he sing and crie,  
*O Alma redemptoris*, ever mo :  
 The swetenesse hath his herte persed so  
 Of Cristes moder, that to hire to pray  
 He cannot stint of singing by the way.

Our firste fo, the serpent Sathanas, 13488  
 That hath in Jewes herte his waspes nest,  
 Up swale and said, O Ebraike peple, alas !  
 Is this to you a thing that is honest,  
 That swiche a boy shal walken as him leste  
 In your despit, and sing of swiche sentence,  
 Which is again our lawes reverence ?

From thennesforth the Jewes han conspired  
 This innocent out of this world to chace :  
 An homicide therto han they hired, 13497

That in an aleye had a privee place, 13498  
 And as the child gan forthby for to pace,  
 This cursed Jew him hent, and held him fast,  
 And cut his throte, and in a pit him cast.

I say that in a wardrope they him threwe,  
 Wher as thise Jewes purgen hir entraille.  
 O cursed folk, of Herodes alle newe,  
 What may your evil entente you availle? 13505  
 Mordre wol out, certain it wol not faille,  
 And namely ther the honour of God shal sprede :  
 The blood out crieth on your cursed dede.

O martyr souted in virginitee,  
 Now maist thou singe, and folwen ever in on  
 The white lamb celestial, quod she,  
 Of which the gret Evangelist Seint John 13512  
 In Pathmos wrote, which sayth that they that gon  
 Beforn this lamb, and singe a song al newe,  
 That never fleshly woman they ne knewe.

This poure widewe awaiteth al that night  
 After hire litel childe, and he came nought.  
 For which as sone as it was dayes light,  
 With face pale of drede and besy thought,  
 She hath at scole and elles wher him sought, 13520

Til finally she gan so fer aspie, 13521  
 That he last seen was in the Jewerie.

With modres pitee in hire brest enclosed  
 She goth, as she were half out of hire minde,  
 To every place, wher she hath supposed  
 By likelihed hire litel child to finde :  
 And ever on Cristes moder meke and kinde  
 She cried, and at the laste thus she wrought, 13528  
 Among the cursed Jewes she him sought.

She freyneth, and she praieth pitously  
 To every Jew that dwelled in thilke place,  
 To telle hire, if hire child went ought forth by :  
 They sayden, Nay ; but Jesu of his grace  
 Yave in hire thought, within a litel space,  
 That in that place after hire sone she cride, 13535  
 Ther he was casten in a pit beside.

O grete God, that parformest thy laude  
 By mouth of innocentes, lo here thy might !  
 This gemme of chastitee, this emeraude,  
 And eke of martirdome the rubie bright,  
 Ther he with throte ycorven lay upright,  
 He *Alma redemptoris* gan to singe  
 So loude, that all the place gan to ringe. 13543



The Cristen folk, that thurgh the strete wente, 13544  
 In comen, for to wondre upon this thing :  
 And hastify they for the provost sente.  
 He came anon withouten taryng,  
 And herieth Crist, that is of heven king,  
 And eke his moder, honour of mankind,  
 And after that the Jewes let he binde.

This child with pitous lamentation 13551  
 Was taken up, singing his song alway :  
 And with honour and gret procession,  
 They carien him unto the next abbey.  
 His moder swouning by the bere lay ;  
 Unnethes might the peple that was there  
 This newe Rachel bringen fro his bere.

With turment, and with shameful beth eche on  
 This provost doth thise Jewes for to sterve, 13559  
 That of this morder wiste, and that anon ;  
 He n'olde no swiche cursednesse observe :  
 Evil shal he have, that evil wol deserve.  
 Therefore with wilde hors he did hem drawe,  
 And after that he heng hem by the lawe.

Upon his bere ay lith this innocent  
 Beforn the auter while the masse last ; 13566

And after that, the abbot with his covent 13567  
 Han spedde hem for to berie him ful fast :  
 And whan they holy water on him cast,  
 Yet spake this child, whan spreint was the holy water ;  
 And sang, *o alma redemptoris mater.*

This abbot, which that was an holy man,  
 As monkes ben, or elles ought to be,  
 This yonge child to conjure he began, 13574  
 And said ; O dere child, I halse thee  
 In vertue of the holy Trinitee,  
 Tell me what is thy cause for to sing,  
 Sith that thy throte is cut to my seming.

My throte is cut unto my nekke bon,  
 Saide this child, and as by way of kinde  
 I shuld have deyde, ye longe time agon : 13581  
 But Jesu Crist, as ye in bookes finde,  
 Wol that his glory last and be in minde,  
 And for the worship of his moder dere,  
 Yet may I sing *o alma* loude and clere.

This welle of mercie, Cristes moder swete,  
 I loved alway, as after my conning :  
 And whan that I my lif shulde forlete,  
 To me she came, and bad me for to sing 13589

This antem veraily in my dying, 13590  
 As ye han herde, and, whan that I had songe,  
 Me thought she laid a grain upon my tonge.

Wherfore I sing, and sing I mote certain  
 In honour of that blisful maiden free,  
 Til fro my tonge of taken is the grain.  
 And after that thus saide she to me ;  
 My litel child, than wol I fetchen thee, 13597  
 Whan that the grain is fro thy tong ytake :  
 Be not agaste, I wol thee not forsake.

This holy monk, this abbot him mene I,  
 His tonge out caught, and toke away the grain ;  
 And he yave up the gost ful softly.  
 And whan this abbot had this wonder sein,  
 His salte teres trilled adoun as reyne : 13604  
 And groff he fell al platte upon the ground,  
 And still he lay, as he had ben ybound.

The covent lay eke upon the pavement  
 Weping and herying Cristes moder dere.  
 And after that they risen, and forth ben went,  
 And toke away this martir fro his bere,  
 And in a tombe of marble stones clere  
 Enclosen they his litel body swete :  
 Ther he is now, God lene us for to mete. 13613

O yonge Hew of Lincoln, slain also 13614  
 With cursed Jewes, as it is notable,  
 For it n'is but a litel while ago,  
 Pray eke for us, we sinful folk unstable,  
 That of his mercy God so merciable  
 On us his grete mercie multiplie,  
 For reverence of his moder Marie. 13620

## PROLOGUE TO SIRE THOPAS.

WHAN said was this miracle, every man  
 As sober was, that wonder was to see,  
 Til that our hoste to japen he began,  
 And than at erst he loked upon me,  
 And saide thus ! What man art thou ? quod he.  
 Thou lokest, as thou woldest finde an hare, 13626  
 For ever upon the ground I see thee stare.

Approche nere, and loke up merily.  
 Now ware you, sires, and let this man have place.  
 He in the waste is shapen as wel as I :  
 This were a popet in an arme to embrace  
 For any woman, smal and faire of face.  
 He semeth elvish by his contenance,  
 For unto no wight doth he daliance. 13634